

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,
For the record my name is Ben Reddish.

I am 29 years old and have been attending Flathead Valley Community College in Kalispell for the last two years. I am also a husband and father. We have been living in the small town of Proctor, approximately 35 miles south of Kalispell for the last 6 ½ years. After working for Les Schwab Tire Center as an Alignment and Brake technician for nearly 8 years, I made the decision to return to school. I enjoyed the work, but found that it was hard on my body and I could see the physical toll it was taking on some of the older employees. I felt it was time to start thinking about making a change. After the birth of my son, the thinking soon evolved into action. I wanted a career, not a job. I wanted something that would challenge me, expand my knowledge, and set a good example for this little man my wife and I were now raising. We knew I was headed back to school.

I began my search at FVCC, as moving was not an option, nor did we feel we could afford a University education. Both in terms of finances and the length of time required. I was very interested in the healthcare field and initially looked at the Surgical Tech and X-Ray tech programs. After careful research with advisors, graduates of both programs, and local healthcare providers, I chose the X-Ray tech program. I had a year and a half of pre-requisite courses to complete before I could even apply to be one of six selected students for the program. I felt confident that I could get into the program and diligently began my pre-requisite courses. I was excited about this new direction and felt very fortunate to be able to have found an option which allowed us to stay in the Flathead.

I am happy to report that I am currently in my second semester of the X-Ray tech program. The last two years have been such an eye opener for me about FVCC and our community as a whole. I had never been around such supportive and enthusiastic people. I now have a whole network of students, teachers, and advisors that I rely on to keep me motivated and striving to do my very best. I have also been the fortunate recipient of several community scholarships and grants. I think the number of scholarships and grants available from the community are a testament of how seriously education is taken, and certainly an indicator that local employers are seeking employees with some level of higher education. Needless to say, I am further encouraged in my decision and further motivated to do well and give something back to the community that so strongly supports the efforts of all students to attain higher education at FVCC.

* AN ADDED BONUS ARE my clinical rotations at various clinics & medical centers, where often I get to observe & assist graduates from the very program I am now in. They are now certified Radiologic Technologists, and it is obvious that they are excellent and enjoy their new careers.

A community college is not only a stepping stone for high school graduates and those looking to transfer to a University, but a much-needed opportunity for adults that have to return to school. My decision was voluntary, but I know of several people that were laid off from large employers in the area that were forced to pursue something different. Having access to a variety of programs through FVCC enabled them to stay in the area and restored their confidence. I have met other students that attended universities years ago, and are now taking classes at FVCC to pursue something different or to further their current careers. The options available and broad ranges of needs that can be met through a community college are invaluable. The cost has been manageable, especially with the help of the scholarships I've been granted, and I know in my heart that I am receiving a high-quality education. I believe small campuses and classrooms can produce greater rewards and experiences for the student. The faculty isn't spread too thin and they can provide more individualized attention and instruction.

My family and I appreciate the access to FVCC made possible in part by State funds. I am hopeful that FVCC will continue to expand and grow to meet the needs of our ever-growing community. I recently read a quote from Montana Senator Max Baucus, and I could not agree more..... "Investing in our education system will strengthen Montana's economy and create more jobs." I believe that I have chosen to study for a career that will bring more meaning to my life, and allow me to feel that I am making a small contribution to our community. Furthermore, I am proud to say that my local Community College is preparing me for that experience.

Thank you for your time today.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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